Protestantism

Its Influence on Modernization in Korea

By Dr. Samuel H. Moffett

Dr. Moffett was born in P'yŏngyang, Korea, in 1916. He graduated from Wheaton College, Princeton Seminary, and Yale University where he obtained his Ph D. and has taught at Princeton Seminary. He was on the faculty of Yenching University in Peking, China. He is presently Dean of the Graduate School of the Presbyterian Seminary in Seoul. His younger brother is also serving in Korea as Superintendent of the Tongsan Christian Hospital in Taegu.

If De Cespedes, who landed briefly in Korea in 1593-94, is more properly classed as a chaplain to Japanese troops than as a missionary to Koreans, then to Carl Gutzlaff, a Protestant, belongs pride of place as the first Western missionary to Korea. He came by sea on July 17, 1832—a German, working for a Dutch missionary society and sailing from China on a British ship—three years before the first of the French priests, Father Pierrre Maubant, crawled bravely through the sewers into the border city of Ŭiju in 1835.

Sharp readers may recognize Gutzlaff beneath a merciless caricature as the missionary in the recent best-seller, *Taipan*. His role in the novel as one of the more colorful of the founders of Hong Kong is pure fiction. Not so his part in the opening of Korea.

For forty days he worked along the west coast of the peninsula, teaching the villagers how to plant potatoes, translating with great difficulty the Lord's Prayer into Korean, and salting his distribution of the Chinese Bible with companion gifts of Western books on science, history and geography. He noted with pleased surprise that "the people, even of the lowest classes, can read, and delight in reading."

His last stop in Korea was Cheju-do, which he described as "a charming spot" for a missionary station and certainly no more dangerous than New Zealand!

Gutzlaff was wrong about the danger. The next three decades witnessed three great persecutions. In August, 1866, a young Protestant

missionary, the Rev. R. Jermain Thomas, wrote from Chefoo, just across the Yellow Sea from the Korean coast, that a Korean junk with a French tricolor at its foremast had been seen heating its way into the harbor. It carried the French missionary, Father Ridel, and a crew of Korean Christians hearing the first news of "a foul and wicked massacre" of Catholics in Korea.

The previous autumn Thomas had spent two and a half months, like Gutzlaff, on Korea's west coast learning the language and distributing Bible portions. The news of the persecution, instead of frightening him, made him determined to return. He left Chefoo on Aug. 9,1866, as interpreter for an American merchant ship bound for Korea with a cargo of "cotton goods, glass, tin plates, etc."

"I will be back in nine days," he said to a colleague. But he never returned. His ship, the *General Sherman*, was caught and burned in the Taetong River near Pyŏngyang. Thomas was beheaded, according to one account, while offering a New Testament to the man with the sword. He was Korea's first Protestant martyr.

These and other early, intermittent Protestant attempts to penetrate forbidden Korea with the Christian faith are often ignored by historians as futile and fruitless. In a way the historians are right. What did Gutzlaff, and Thomas, and Williamson and Corbett accomplish? A few potatoes planted, the Lord's Prayer translated but not appreciated, some Western learning and the Bible placed in a few frightened hands. And one martyr, who was killed probably not for his faith but because his ship was mistaken either for a retaliatory French invasion force or a grave-robbing expedition.

It is difficult to discern in these faltering contacts and melancholy failures the wave of the future, yet such they were, or at least the first advancing ripples of a new age. For Protestantism was to do more for the transformation and modernization of Korea in the next few decades (1884–1919) than anything accomplished in the whole preceding century of Christian impact on the Hermit Kingdom

When Protestants came in force and to stay, beginning in 1884, their gospel was a spiritual gospel and their preaching was straight from the Bible, but their mission was as broad and as wide as the needs of the people, and its transforming effect was explosive.

Dr. Horace Allen, a Presbyterian physician was the first resident Protestant missionary in Korea. He arrived in September, 1884. Undiscouraged by a night in "Harry's Hotel" in what is now Inch'ŏn—where the one-story thatched-roof house contained only a bar and a billiard room separated by a sheet, and one slept on the billiard table—he pressed on to Seoul, little dreaming, missionary that he was, that he would some day "make possible Korea's first railroad, her first waterworks, her

first city lighting, and street cars, and her first modern mine." Perhaps even more importantly, he opened Korea's first modern hospital, and then moved from missions into diplomacy as an early resident minister of the American Legation. No national problem or interest was considered out of hounds for Christian care and concern.

Some of the earliest criticisms of the first Protestant missionaries, in fact, centered around their interest in other than strictly religious matters. When Underwood imported kerosene and agricultural implements, and Moffett organized a timber concession on the Yalu, and Swallen and Adams brought in Korea's first apple trees and started orchards in Wŏnsan and Taegu, Western commercial traders protested.

Such activities were beyond the province of missionaries, the traders cried. It was not fair of them to use their intimate knowledge of Korea and close Korean contacts for commercial enterprises, and it galled them all the more that the missionaries were doing it not for personal gain but to teach Koreans modern technologies and business methods so that they could compete on more equal terms as Western civilization poured in upon them. Such pioneering ventures made Christianity a force for economic revolution in Korea.

The role of Protestant missions as a force for intellectual revolution in Korea is even more familiar. When Henry Appenzeller opened his little Methodist school in 1886, it was not the Christian faith that attracted students and persuaded the "President of the Korean Foreign Office, the Honorable Kim Yun-sik" to present it with a sign naming it "The Hall for the Training of Useful Men." What attracted the government's notice was the foreign learning taught in a curriculum that aimed to "give to Korean students thorough training in the curriculum of Western science and literature, uniting with it the essential features of the present native school system". Even this was not too much of an attraction for the first students. They had to be paid to attend.

But as Korea neared the twentieth century, dissatisfaction with the old Confucian educational patterns created a snowballing demand for radical reforms. A new Korea demanded new ideas, new methods, new schools, new men, and for a short while at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, these seemed to be available only in schools the Protestants were energetically founding.

"We are in the midst of an educational revolution," wrote missionaries in Syenchun in 1908. "Schools spring up in a night. . . The old Confucian scholars lose their proud seats, giving place to those who know both Chinese and Western learning. So strong has been the leadership of the church that. . . the course of study used in Christian schools has been the pattern for unbelievers' schools as well. During the year probably as many as five or six hundred primary and night schools claiming

to teach Western learning have been started by officials and other unbelievers in our territory. The church schools are in the lead of all and influence all."

Nowhere was the revolution wrought by the Christian schools more radical than in the field of education for women. Dr. Helen Kim tells of the days when as far as women were concerned, "Korea was like a desert." Mrs. Nansa Hahn Kim came at night to call on a missionary. Setting the little lantern in front of Miss Frey she blew out the candle. Pointing to the dark lantern, she said, "My life is like that—dark as midnight. Won't you give me an opportunity to find light?"

It was through the Protestant schools that Korean women first found that light. Mrs. Scranton opened her "Girls' School and Home" in 1886, with one student, the concubine of an official who wanted her to learn English with the hope that she might some day become interpreter for Queen Min.

In 1910 that same school, now called Ewha, shocked the old-fashioned by introducing college-grade work for women. Under its college principal, Miss Lulu Frey, there began a transforming ferment in Korean society that revolutionized everything from women's clothes to public health. Women's role in Korean society has never since been quite the same.

Whether for women or for men, those first Christian experiments in Korean education at Paichai, Sungsil, Kyesong, Ewha and Yonsei—tentative and uncertain and at times slightly ridiculous though they may have been—were the serious beginnings of an educational revolution that was to shatter the grip of the past and open Korea's mind to the future. For the first time education became available to all, not just to the elite—to high and low, men and women, rich and poor.

The opening wedge, however, in Protestantism's contribution to the modernization of Korea was medicine, not education. It was not the educator but the doctor who first won acceptance for the hitherto persecuted missionaries. In Korea the pioneer was Dr. Horace Allen, and his first great success occurred in the coup of 1884.

Prince Min, nephew to the queen and leader of the great Min clan was dying in a pool of blood, seven sword cuts on his head and body. Over the objections of fourteen palace physicians who were about to pour black pitch into the general's wounds, Allen was called and raced across town with an escort of fifty soldiers. For three months he fought to save the Prince's life, and succeeded. "That man did not come from America, he came from heaven," said one amazed official, and a grateful king rewarded Allen with permission to open a hospital in Seoul sponsored by the government "in cooperation with a benevolent society in America." It was the first official approval by the Korean government

of missionary work in Korea. An even more sweeping sign of approval followed when the hospital opened and the King sent over a group of dancer-concubines as a gift—"to act as nurses," Allen insisted!

It was Allen's miracle of healing that first began to remove the aura of menace and suspicion that for centuries had clouded the image of the foreigner in the Korean mind. Other able medical missionaries followed: Scranton, Heron, Avison. They further won the gratitude of the populace by stemming fearful cholera epidemics in 1886 and 1895. Heron and Avison, who succeeded Allen as superintendents of the hospital, were also appointed personal physicians to the King, and Dr. Lillias Horton (Mrs. H. G. Underwood) attended the Queen. Up to that time the Queen had been treated by doctors who, because they were men, were forbidden to touch the person of the Queen. "They felt her pulse by using a cord, one end of which was fastened about her wrist and the other, carried into the next room, was held in the doctor's fingers," wrote Mrs. Underwood. "The royal tongue was protruded through a slit in a screen for the physician's observation."

It could not in any way be claimed that all the old taboos and medical superstitutions in Korea were dispelled with the cleansing advent of Protestant medical practice. Acupuncturists, herbalists and shamans still flourish in every village and city. But though the old ways are long-lived, the revolution has come, Even the bare chronological record of Protestant innovations is impressive:

1884 Dr. Horace Allen, the first resident Western physician, reaches Korea.

1885 Dr. Allen opens the Royal Hospital (now Severance Hospital), the first modern medical institution in the country.

1886 Drs. Allen and Heron, with lay assistance from Mr. Underwood, begin the first Western medical education.

1890 Dr. Rosetta Sherwood (Hall) begins medical education for women.

1899 Dr. Rosetta Hall and Dr. Alice Fish Moffett open schools for blind girls and blind boys respectively in Pyongyang.

1900 Esther Kim Park, the first Korean doctor, arrives with an American medical degree.

1903-06 First nurses' training schools.

1908 Graduation of the first seven doctors from Severance Medical College. First graduate nurses' association.

1910 First leper asylum, Pusan.

"Medicine has been our substitute for miracles," a missionary once said, not to disparage miracles but in tribute to his medical colleagues. And medicine has indeed worked its transforming, modernizing miracle in Korea, where there was not even a word for nurse in the Korean

language until Miss Edmunds, the Methodists' first trained nurse, invented one.

In agriculture, too, the Protestants made a pioneering impact. Early missionaries like William Swallen in the north and J. E. Adams in the south brought the first fruit apple trees to Korea, and at their urging Christian farmers here and there began to plant their upper slopes in orchards. In 1921 an apple tree disease began to spread and threatened to wipe out the new industry. But providentially just at that time Korea's first scientifically trained agricultural missionary arrived, Dexter N. Lutz. He promptly set up a network of classes to show the farmers how to save their trees.

He did not stop with apples. Lutz developed drought-resistant grains; urged crop diversification; campaigned tirelessly for reforestation and crop rotation; and founded *Farmers' Life*, one of the very few magazines to try to teach the village farmer new methods to help him in his struggle for existence. Lutz also helped to create Korea's first college department of agriculture at Sungsil College in Pyŏngyang.

But perhaps the contribution to modernization in Korea which has most endeared Protestants to the Korean people has been their part in Korea's struggle for freedom and democracy. That early band of American and Canadian pioneers who carried the faith to Korea came almost without exception form the puritan protestant tradition, which, differing from mediaeval Catholicism, forms "the second great main type of Christian social doctrine." It was from this tradition, historically, that modern democracy was born. It is no accident, therefore, that Protestantism in Korea from the beginning was linked to the movement for democracy and independence.

The early radical reformers, rebelling against Yi Dynasty autocracy, consciously sought alliance with the missionaries, especially through Sŏ Jai-Pil and his later Independence Club. The dedication of Independence Arch was practically a Christian worship service. So Jae-Pil never lost an opportunity to speak for responsible democratic freedom. One day he stopped two men fighting on a Seoul street, and promptly began to lecture them and the crowd that gathered: "These two friends have a perfect right to fight, if they wish," he said" But they have no right to tie up traffic here and cause inconvenience to others. Let us remember that all men are entitled to freedom which God gave us. But let us remember that we cannot claim freedom for ourselves while at the same time taking freedom from other people."

Syngman Rhee was all his life strongly influenced by Protestant missions, beginning with the day Horace Allen saved his eyesight as a child. Imprisoned and tortured for demonstrating against political reaction, Rhee was regularly visited by Underwood, Appenzeller and

Avison. It was there he was converted, and there he wrote his first book, *Spirit of Independence*, with its call to a new concept of govcrnment for Korea, democracy. It was an idea he had first learned at Paechae Academy, the first mission school founded in Korea.

With the fall and exile of the reformers during the last years of the Yi Dynasty, and the heginnings of Japanese colonialism, the Protestant church hecame the only viable conduit for the spread and practice of the democratic ideal.

Kiel Sun-Ju, the great Protestant evangelist and major signer of the 1919 Declaration of Independence, used to tell how he learned of democracy through long talks with Samuel A. Moffett, heginning about 1901, as together they hegan to plan a constitution for a self-governing, independent Korean Presbyterian Church. Their hopes were realized with the organization of that church in 1907. By that time Kiel was so enthusiastic a convert to the concept of representative rule that he declared, "Democracy must not he limited to the church and the nation. We must hegin with the Christian family." Forthwith he shocked his neighhors, even the Christians, hy renouncing his authoritative rule as Korean father, and instituted what he proudly describecl as "the first family democracy in Korea".

He told his sons they would be free to marry girls of their own choice. Family prohlems were to he settled in a free and democratic way. When, for example, he found that his sons' pigeons were spoiling the roof, he called a family council. "The pigeons must go," he announced. "Let us vote." To his vast suprise he ahruptly found that democracy might not always run his way. The sons voted against him. But the canny old evangelist knew human nature even hetter than democracy. He said the next day to the youngest son. "Wouldn't you rather have a deer than pigeons?" And at the next vote, the pigeons went.

Closely associated with the crusade for modern democracy in Korean life was Korea's long and often tragic, hut finally triumphant fight for independence. At the very heginning, it was the Protestant, missionary community that spoke out most directly against Japanese infringements on Korean sovereignity. And it was a magazine puhlished hy Protestant missionaries, *The Korea Repository*, which first made known to the English-speaking world the full details of the murder of Queen Min and made it impossihle for the Japanese to exonerate themselves and throw the hlame upon "Koreans disguised as Japanese," as their first reports deceitfully put it. Homer Hulhert's *Korea Review* carried on the protest, and his famous *The Passing of Korea*, recently reprinted by Yonsei University, is the classic, most eloquent presentation of Korea's case for freedom ever made hy a Westerner.

By the time of the Conspiracy Case of 1911–12, missionary sympathy

for the cause of Korean independence was such an open fact that the Japanese prosecution at the trial of 123 Korean patriots went so far as to try to implicate two missionaries, George S. McCune and S. A. Moffett in the alleged plot.

Up to 1919 the missionaries for the most part had tried hard to remain outwardly neutral, sympathizing with the patriots, but recognizing the established government, as befitted guests in a country not their own. But after March 1, 1919 they were neutral no longer. "No neutrality for brutality," they cried.

Dr. Frank Schofield, a Canadian missionary at Severance Hospital, hecame famous for smuggling pictures of the uprising out of the country to the foreign press. Dr. H. H. Underwood managed to get an eye-witness account of the massacre and churchburning at Che-am-ni to America, where it was read into the Congressional Record. The Rev. Eli Mowry of Pyŏngyang became the only Westerner actually imprisoned for involvement with the 1919 Independence Movement. Half of the 33 Korean signers of the Declaration of Independence were Protestant Christians.

They failed, of course. Korea was not to he free for another twenty-six years. But transformation, modernization and independence never come easily, nor, all at once. Protestants can he justly proud of their small share in the early agony and tumult, faith and hope of the heginnings of modernization in Korea.

Delegates from Korea to the Jerusalem Missionary Conferencee in 1928. From left to right, S.A. Moffett, W.A. Noble, Hugh H.W. Cynn, In Kwa Cheng, Helen Kim, and Bishop J.S.Ryang.

Dr. Samuel A.Moffett, father of the author of the article on Protestantism, is shown at a women's meeting. Christianity had a profound influence on the emancipation of women in Korea. This photo has been preserved by Dr. S.H. Moffett.

MODERN TRANSFORMATION OF KOREA

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